DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 506 IR 057 777

AUTHOR Torres, Patricio Aranda
TITLE Parliamentary Library and Information Services as Instruments for Democratic Development.
PUB DATE 1999-08-00
NOTE 7p.; In: IFLA Council and General Conference. Conference Programme and Proceedings (65th, Bangkok, Thailand, August 20-28, 1999); see IR 057 674.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/070-101e.htm.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Information; *Citizen Role; Democracy; Foreign Countries; *Government Libraries; *Information Services; Information Systems; Information Technology; *Library Role; *Mass Media Role
IDENTIFIERS *Parliamentary Libraries; Peru

ABSTRACT

This paper formulates the means for an improved role for all citizens through a dynamic and interactive parliamentary library and information system. It illustrates the success of such a proposal to strengthen the legitimacy of parliaments by referring to the experience of the Congress of the Republic of Peru and explains what is being done to help Peruvian citizens who do not yet have personal access to electronic networks. Following an introduction, the first section discusses networks and the media, including the Internet as a social institution, differences between audiovisual information and the electronic medium, the role of parliaments and their information services, the importance of communication in policy making, and control of political information by the television, newspaper, and radio media. The Peruvian experience is described in the second section, including the Peruvian Virtual Parliament, a weekly radio program, and access through the World Wide Web to the Digital Archive Systems for Peruvian Legislation. The third section covers the Library of the Peruvian Congress, including objectives, services, collections, electronic catalog, and staff. Library services to encourage citizen participation are summarized in the last section. (MES)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 441 506

IFLANET
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
Search Contacts
Annual Conference

65th IFLA Council and General Conference

Bangkok, Thailand,
August 20 - August 28, 1999

Conference Proceedings

Code Number: 070-101-E
Division Number: I
Professional Group: Library and Research Services for Parliaments
Joint Meeting with: -
Meeting Number: 101
Simultaneous Interpretation: *No*

Parliamentary library and information services as instruments for democratic development

Patricio Aranda Torres
Library of Congress
Congress of the Republic of Peru
Lima, Peru

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
■ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
□ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A.L. Van Wesermael

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract

Democracy in many countries is currently undergoing a crisis due to the influence of powerful media interests, which disseminate views and comment which can, in turn, determine political outcomes. The explosion of media networks has given rise to a new form of interactive citizens' participation within the political system. This "network society" which incorporates the most dynamic social segments of the constituency, tends to exclude sectors which do not have the financial resources and technological skills necessary to access this new communication medium.

This paper formulates the means for an improved role for all citizens through a dynamic and interactive parliamentary library and information system. It illustrates the success of such a proposal to strengthen the legitimacy of parliaments by referring to the experience of the Congress of the Republic of Peru and explains what is being done to help Peruvian citizens who do not yet have personal access to electronic networks.

Paper

INTRODUCTION

We are all acquainted with the results of the worldwide globalization process. It has involved, amongst other developments, the integration of financial markets, the increased significance of

IR057777

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the Asia Pacific region, European unification, the transformation of the former Soviet block, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the voluntary association of cooperating third world economies into an interdependent system. The latter system works as a real time unit, that is, all changes taking place in one part of the world immediately affect other parts in a chain reaction, examples being the Asian and Brazilian Crises, and the "Tequila" effect. Globalization has also resulted, for many countries, in uneven development within society, specifically in relation to the less dynamic sectors and areas of particular societies. These sectors are at risk of turning into irrelevant participants in the democratic process, especially from the perspective of access to electronic information.

In this context, information units attached to legislatures can play an important role in social integration. They are able to mount interactive computer networks which disseminate important information to a broad cross-section of society as well as offering a direct line of communication with political representatives. The development of these technologies has created a new means of communication and has generated some important social changes in such varied areas as gender relations, environmental awareness and even political systems. Information technology has the capacity, where it can be made widely accessible, to impact most spheres of human activity, actually helping to shape the society of which it is a part.

NETWORKS AND THE MEDIA

Within this context, the Internet has now become a rather social institution, which can currently enable the state not only to implement an accelerated process of technological modernization, but also to apply this and other means to interact with its people, and to have real (virtual) citizens' participation. The achievement of this purpose requires the employment of systems conducive to upgrading electronic mail to worldwide standards.

The major difference between audiovisual information and the electronic medium is the opportunity for interaction provided by the latter. Many authors already refer to the existence of the information society as a new way of development, where the technology is the source of productivity, generating knowledge, information processing and communication of symbols. The new "information society" is oriented towards the accumulation of knowledge and increasing degrees of sophistication in information processing, which allows data to be organized and readily communicated. Within this information society, networking logic allows libraries and information units to interrelate with users through a common digital language that prepares, saves, processes, retrieves and transmits information.

Parliaments and their libraries and information services can take the opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of democracy by providing information on the political process direct to citizens, meeting the demand in the society for transparency with respect to policy making. In this way, technology (understood as the use of scientific knowledge to enhance productivity or communication) is used to foster a greater participation. The legitimization of the parliamentary institution is fundamental to the democratic law-making process. This legitimacy relies upon the citizens' knowledge and acceptance of legislative activities, and it is vital that the parliament should develop mechanisms which allow the use of technology to transmit such information to the citizens.

Effective policy making is dependent upon communication. Political manifestos tend to be compared with the current realities facing a community, resulting in a judgment by the constituents on the likely success of the measures outlined, and their impact on society as a whole and on discrete sections. To develop a relationship between the ruler and those ruled - there must be representation and communication. All political parties and groups should project their strategies through similar technological means if they want them to reach the people. This would ensure the support of an adequate number of citizens who, by utilizing the same medium, have access to the legislators.

Recent developments have shown how the television, newspaper and radio media can

effectively control political communication and information through monopolistic growth or through media management. Fortunately this has in most cases fallen just short of political exclusion, which can adversely affect not only elections, but also the complete political organization, the decision-making process, and indeed the government itself. Those political parties which are still based on the organizational and political strategies of the industrial era observe the diminution of their autonomy due to the strong dependence on these information flows. In other words, the atomization of interests in societies allows the media to gain influence, since their clear messages provide a sense of identity for a huge conglomerate lacking common a common reference base. Those who are trained media practitioners have an advantage over those who do not have that communicative talent. The result of this can be notoriously seen in Latin America where it accounts for an average of 13 hours a day of turned on TV, and where politicians and parties become consumer goods instead of philosophers, educators or managers. This dependence can make a Government to collapse as in the Color de Mello case in Brazil where the TV network, radio and the press (O' Globo) no longer supported him and revealed the corruption charges on which he was subsequently impeached. This illustrates the need for decision makers to communicate. If they do not there may be a crisis in the democratic process in this information era, demonstrating the necessity for information to be generated within the parliamentary organization. Generators of information within the parliament, who are used to providing accurate and impartial information, are able to create the vital environment to introduce these new forms of direct communication with citizens, without the filtering commonly employed by the audiovisual media. This will aid both the nation-states and their citizens in the recovery of their autonomous status and independence, both of which have been undermined by the dynamics of global information flows led by rich and powerful transorganizational data networks. That undermining has frequently led to sectors of society ceasing to take an informed interest in their government and to a consequential fragmenting of the political system. The recovery or legitimization of democracy can be achieved through the opportunity provided by electronic communication to increase political participation generally and in particular horizontal communication among citizens, reversing the fragmentation brought about by manipulative media interests.

THE PERUVIAN EXPERIENCE

The information systems of the Congress of the Republic of Peru have been designed to achieve both of these ends. On the one hand, the purpose is to encourage participation by citizens, including direct involvement with MPs regarding their social needs. On the other, it is aimed at generating direct communication lines with the voters, circumventing any bias and misinterpretation from the audiovisual media, which often tend to undermine government policy.

This is exemplified by the Peruvian Virtual Parliament, created in 1996, a computerized network system through which the Congress of the Republic is made interactively available to citizens and institutions - both within Peru and abroad - with a view to encouraging their participation in the different activities conducted by the Congress. This form of participation enables citizens to directly interact with the legislative institution from any computer connected to the World Wide Web, and to propose by this means legislative proposals, demands, opinions or suggestions. In brief, this is a mechanism striving to consolidate the bases of the democratic system in Peru, since it is fundamentally structured on participation of each citizen and institution, making possible fluid political communication and an efficient decision making process within the legislative sphere.

Citizens are able to gain information, and make their views known on particular bills; submit direct petitions to their congressmen or the respective committee; participate in discussion forum, or propose to conduct them. Each citizen is previously registered and receives an access code in order to ensure reliability of his or her participation. Finally, it offers a friendship club where students have the opportunity to take part in civil culture and political knowledge contests from their school booths, witness the congressional sessions and visit the Congress, even if they come from the distant interior of the country.

Another information system developed by the Peruvian Congress is the Radio Program "Gathering center with the Congress" which broadcasts weekly the congressional activities and discusses specific issues one hour every week. It should be emphasized that this program has a regular audience, competing with other exclusively musical programs broadcast at the same time, suggesting that there exists an unsatisfied demand among the society with respect to Congressional information. This program can be obtained from the Internet in MP3 format, a digital audio and video format which, due the quality of the compression of audio data, is widely used to distribute audio (music) through the Internet and other resources. Results from the parliament's electronic voting system are also reported on the Internet allowing citizens to have access to precise information about their representatives' performance and attendance.

Digital press systems have enabled the development of direct communication not only with citizens, but also with information chiefs of the mass media, so that greater accuracy in the information disseminated is achieved. To this end, the electronic gazette *El Heraldo* provides on-line information about congressmen's varied activities, agreements, discussions and statements. Likewise, *La Gaceta del Congreso* makes public the agenda of the committees and of the Plenary of Congress and is distributed electronically to those citizens interested in receiving a copy. Sessions of the Plenary and the Permanent Commission are transcribed and published on-line on the web through our Debate Journal. This text system is linked to another image system called Virtual Television through which a session, in a segment of video, can be retrieved via a certain type of search that can be made by main subject, date or congressman.

The Digital Archive System for Peruvian Legislation is available through the web and allows access to all laws, legislative resolutions, supreme decrees and other legal regulations through two blocks: laws numbered from year 1904 up to date; and non-numbered laws from 1821 to 1904. The archive employs PDF format and prints of the documents can be directly obtained.

Since 1995, our Bills System has enabled inquirers to refer to a status report of all those bills submitted which have been enacted, or been filed. The system, developed in Lotus Notes format, permits searching and recovery of information by date of presentation, number of bill, congressman submitting the bill, political party or parliamentary bench, and even committee empowered to judge. It is important to point out that each of the 27 committees has an individual web page, where not only approved bills or information on members composing the said committee can be referred to, but so also can the work presented by specialists invited to the sessions or to the extra-parliamentary hearings carried out in the interior of the country.

The web page also provides detailed information on Congressmen's travels abroad and we also have a word search system through which one may enter a word on the constitution web page and the system will retrieve all results concerning that word.

Finally, specific distribution lists relating to different areas of interest allow citizens with concerns on particular topics to receive specialized information on relevant subjects. The databases available include a list of laws including a complete text of every law that is passed; a list of bills, including a complete text of every bill that is submitted; a list of Press News including all press notes released by the Congress; a list of photographs including JPEG images, about the main activities performed by the Congress, being those most frequently used by the media. The latter are distributed by e-mail to the information editors of the mass media.

Then we have information compiled by the Library (including information announcements providing citizens with the possibility of requesting free copies): links of interest on the World Wide Web; invitations to conferences of distinguished specialists in all subjects of national interest; and announcements of the latest books published by the Editorial Fund of the Congress, or working documents of the committees. This information is distributed by a mailing list that has more than 3000 members.

The Library of Congress

The Library of the Peruvian Congress, was restructured in July 1997 and forms part of the collection of the former Public Library and Legislative Library, the latter being the collection, in its turn, of the earlier House of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. Although there is not an exact date of the foundation of the two first libraries, we know that the first Congress legislators of 1822 already had a basic collection of doctrine books and law digests dating back to 'colonial laws' or the so-called 'Indian laws', the first compilation of which dates back to the late 17th century and is still conserved in the Library's research room.

The fundamental objective of the Library is to gather, classify and disseminate materials and services to assist the decision making process of the Congress. A major task in progress is the widening of electronic services, involving the development of internal resources, such as an automated search system for reference material, laws, bills, decisions, debate journals, as well as other types of information provided on an Intranet and on the web site of the Congress. In addition to the Reference and Consultation Room, the Newspapers and Periodicals Library and the various special collections of the Library, there is also an Electronic Information Center within the Library. This Center is equipped with 18 PCs from which users of the Library have free access to the Congressional Intranet databases and the Internet. The Library currently has more than 100,000 volumes including complete collections of newspapers such as *"El Comercio"* since 1839 and *"El Peruano"* since 1836, as well as our Debates Journal, which is a transcript of all words pronounced on the Floor by all Deputies and Senators from 1866 to date.

The Library's electronic catalog gives on-line access to the 12,000 bibliographic entries corresponding to more than 30,000 volumes, with searching by author, title or subject from any Internet access point. The loan system is electronically controlled and the internal users of the Library reserve books from their office.

The total staff of the Library is 20, including 8 research and subject analyst staff, 7 professional librarians, 2 translators and 1 legal expert. The Library's electronic services are constantly updated by our staff, and these and other staff provide the specialized computer search services. The role of the Library in relation to the Congress web site is to be the physical threshold to all these services for the citizens and to provide the guiding system for the internal services developed in the Congress of the Republic, together with the Department of Special Projects which is charged with preparing the data for Web purposes.

PARTICIPATION FOR ALL

The exclusion of certain sectors of society from networked information is unavoidable at present, since not all of them have the facilities required for access. The question is: "How do we generate the sort of participation described above in social sectors which are not connected to the network?" This is one of the Congress's main concerns: it is the reason for the establishment of free public booths, and constant encouragement by the Executive to connect educational centers throughout the country. Currently around 10% of Peruvian state schools is connected through a system implemented by the Ministry of Education. This year's goal is to extend the figure to 15%. As well as this, the Congress has a special program entitled ***"Itinerant Parliament"*** . This has involved the establishment of a special public service environment which provides information about the organization and functions of the Congress and a variety of participatory access points which the legislature has put at the citizens' disposal, including publicly available Internet booths, so that citizens may have open access to this service, free of charge.

As this accounts shows, parliamentary libraries and congressional information services can encourage more participation and understanding from the general public concerning the activities of their congressional representatives, who finally represent the population's feelings. That is why the Library has an active interaction with citizens through technological events, and multi-interest events, such as the *Feria del Hogar* (which is a fair at which many

companies offer a variety of products and recreational activities) and the *Feria del Libro* (a fair offering a wide variety of books), and we provide training in the use of electronic resources to any visitors to these fairs who request it. We have a visits program that is fully scheduled until July of this year with more than 700 people and we are able to provide courses on management of electronic resources which may also be offered to visitors.

These activities also lead to a greater strengthening of democracy, since all electoral systems are part of a market where voters will give their vote for those who best comply with their function as representatives of specific groups of electors, and such facilities open communication channels to permit them to exercise a better degree of choice and control.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Cevasco Piedra, José "The Mechanisms for the Direct Participation of Citizens in the Parliamentary System of Peru". In Constitutional and Parliamentary Information No. 74/2nd, 1997, p. 160-163

2. Davis, Richard Politics and the Media. New Jersey, 1998. Prentice Hall

3. Del Rey Morató, Javier ¿De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de comunicación política? (What do we mean by political communication?). In: Revista de Estudios de Comunicación, December 1996, p.8

4. Navarro i Barba, Gustau. Hegemonía y subalternidad en la Red Internet. (Hegemony and subalternate in the Internet Network) In: Noticias de la Arqueología y la Antropología. June 3, 1998, [www.naya.org]

5. Perelli, Carina. La personalización de la política, nuevos caudillos, outsiders, política mediática y política informal. (Personalization of politics, new caudillos, outsiders, mediatic policy, and informal policy). In: Partidos y clase política en América Latina en los 90. Costa Rica, IIDH, CAPEL, 1995.

6. Planas Pedro. Comunicación política y equidad electoral. (Political communication and electoral equity). Lima - Universidad de Lima 1998.

7. Website of the Congress of the Republic of Peru [http://www.congreso.gob.pe/index.htm]

Latest Revision: *June 8, 1999*

Copyright © 1995-1999
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
www.ifla.org